



# Scottish International Committee's Newsletter ...

Volume 7 Spring 2015

## LINKS

- [Working internationally](#)
- [About](#)
- [Making international policy](#)
- [Events](#)
- [News](#)
- [Resources](#)



## Editorial

The spring edition of our newsletter is with you. The purpose of this non-editorial driven publication is to keep our readers fully aware on Scottish International Committee's work. Hence, neither the Editor nor the Publisher is liable for the accuracy of the content. Editorial team members Hamid Rasheed and Sam Macartney are keen to have your views to improve this publication. Please provide your feedback to: Simon Macfarlane. Regional Organiser UNISON House, 14 West Campbell Street Glasgow G2 6RX Tel: 0845 355 0845 Email:s.macfarlane@unison.co.uk

## UNISON Marks 30th Anniversary of Bhopal Disaster...

Report by Tony Caleary UNISON Stirling Branch

The chair of UNISON Scotland's International Committee, Sam Macartney, Tony Caleary UNISON Stirling Branch, and Health & Safety Committee, Scott Donohoe visited India with a delegation to mark the 30th anniversary of Bhopal Disaster. The disaster struck as a result of 45 tons leak of deadly gas methyl isocyanate, from Union Carbide Plant in Bhopal on the night of 2nd December 1984, and cost 25000 lives.



Members of the delegation thank Organisers, UNISON branches, that helped Scottish trade unions to show solidarity to those affected, and to affirm that lost lives of 25,000 people have not been forgotten by the international community. The delegation met survivors, survivors groups, clinics, activists, politicians, community groups, NGOs, Trades Unions and members of the press. The visit helped delegates in building their understanding on what happened? What's happening today? What needs to be done about it? The delegates realised that there is a need to raise awareness about Bhopal disaster, to build pressure through Trade Union and political links. In addition to that there is also a need to assess what humanitarian aid and financial assistance the delegation can identify to improve the ongoing situation.



**Tony Caleary of UNISON Stirling Branch narrates ...**

**29-30 November:** I met with the Delegation in Edinburgh Airport at 16.30pm. Journey to India was long, friendly and uneventful. Mumbai and airport was very modern, efficient and clean. It was really strange to see shanty towns sprawling just outside the boundary fence of the modern, efficient airport. It struck me that India was a place

of extremes. My first experience of road travel in India was a white-knuckle taxi ride to our hotel in Bhopal. After twenty rather scary minutes, we arrived at the hotel around eleven pm. The hotel was very welcoming – clean, but tired.

### 1 December

We then hired some tuc tucs (motor rickshaws) and headed to a large open air square called "Iqbal Maidan". Road travel in India is even more terrifying in the daylight!

Iqbal Maidan was staging the Mela (Festival) of the Alternatives. There was a large stage and many interesting and informative stalls. The stallholders belonged to organisations >>> Page 2

## 30th Anniversary of Bhopal Disaster ....

that either had a direct link with the Bhopal disaster or had links with environmental issues. Our delegation had a stall. We hung our banner (front cover), handed out leaflets in both English and Hindi explaining who we were and why we were there. Some of the delegates had brought some things, such as pens and key rings, to give away. In the afternoon, another tuc tuc ride to Sambhavna clinic. The clinic treats survivors of the gas leak and those who are born with illnesses related to it. It is a small oasis of tranquillity in a very busy city. The clinic is modern and clean and has an extensive garden where they grow plants that are used to treat patients. The clinic receives no government funding and is dependent on donations to stay open.

From Sambhavna clinic, we walked to Chingari Trust. This is a clinic where they treat children who are still being born with illnesses and disabilities due to the gas disaster. At the Trust a chap called Tabish gave us a tour of the facility.

In 2004, Rashida Bee and Champa Devi Shukla were honoured with the Goldman Environment Prize. Despite both women being the sole breadwinners of their families, they decided not to accept the \$125,000 prize money for themselves. They decided to donate the entire amount to setup a charitable trust, dedicated to alleviating the sufferings of gas victims of Bhopal born to the next generation. The Chingari trust was registered in March 2005 and this is how the Chingari trust was born.



Rashida Bee and Champa Devi

The Chingari trust has speech therapists, occupational therapists, physios and teachers for children with special educational needs



that treat the children on a one to one basis. The Chingari trust can only treat around two hundred each week, many of whom are profoundly disabled. The trust is currently having a waiting list of almost one thousand children who urgently need their assistance. The trust receives no funding from the government and runs on donations. Watching these professional working with the children was an incredibly moving and thought provoking experience.

Later on we went Kamla Park to join a group of survivors and some other international visitors to take part in a Commemoration rally and March back to Iqbal Maidan. Marching in India is a rather strange affair. The traffic doesn't stop, it just sort of carries on around

you. You don't march as a group of people; you March on in two single-file lines.

We came back to Iqbal Maidan, where thousands of candles were lit at a commemoration event, with speakers, a play and traditional music. Then another tuc tuc ride back to the hotel.

**2 December:** The delegation met Rashida Bee, Champa Devi Shukla, and workers, at the Stationery Workers workplace. After that we attend a national solidarity meeting. This was a large gathering of people from all over India, and a small number from elsewhere. It was really heartening to see and hear so many people who were striving to ensure that Bhopal was not forgotten.

In the afternoon, we walked by the ruins of the Union Carbide Factory. I didn't realise, until this point, how close it is to so many homes and businesses. Just outside the factory, there is a memorial to those who died in the Bhopal disaster. The memorial has become the focal point around many of the events, scheduled to take place during the anniversary.

We attended the official opening of the new Remember Bhopal Museum. The museum is set up by local activists as an alternative to the government's proposal, to make part of the factory site a museum. >>> Page 3



National Solidarity Meeting

## 30th Anniversary of Bhopal Disaster ....



The museum was exceptionally moving and harrowing. Many locals had donated items that formed parts of the exhibits.

An elderly lady, whose baby died during the disaster, had donated her child's baby-grow to the museum. I'll never forget the sight of her crying loudly just outside the entrance to the museum!

We then went back to Iqbal Maidan where we were on stage, with our banner. Some of the delegates spoke and with help of an interpreter answered questions. We then made way for other speakers. The speakers were followed by more theatre and traditional music.



Torch Light Procession

Later on with our banner we headed, to a torchlight procession, to Union Carbide plant. This was an amazing, noisy and exciting two hour march through Bhopal with kerosene fuelled torches. Namdev, a survivor grabbed our banner and marched with us with us the whole way. The march ended up at a short rally, at the memorial opposite the Union Carbide plant.

**3 December:** The delegation attended a solidarity event, where a number of arts based events were organised. There was mime, a mural and poetry. This was read in English in a rather staid manner then performed in Hindi in a much more dramatic way. We presented UNISON Quiches

to the Sambhavna clinic, Chingari trust and to a pensioner's survivor group called ICJB. This was again done with the assistance of an interpreter.

We then joined the anniversary march to the Union Carbide plant. This was another colourful and noisy two hour march. At the memorial once again there was a rally, where effigies of Warren Anderson, Chairman of Union Carbide (at the time of the disaster), were set alight. We finished the day at the film premier of a film, "A Prayer for Rain". Most of the audience were survivors and their families. The film was in Hindi but still incredibly moving and thought-provoking.

**4 December:** We had a little bit of time to ourselves before heading to the airport and the onward flight to Mumbai and an airport hotel.

**5 December:** We attended a meeting with a number of trade unionists and Bhopal activists for a general discussion around Bhopal and ways of increasing solidarity between India and Scotland. From there we went on to a press conference at the Press Club. There was quite a good press turnout and a good question and answer session followed. From the Press Club, after having an almost two hour of start stop taxi ride through Mumbai, we arrived



Mela of Alternatives



Mela of Alternatives

at the airport to catch the onward flight to Dehli.

**6 December:** The night stay in Dehli was at the YMCA. Immediately after breakfast, we took the local underground to meet with Gautam of NTUI. It was particularly interesting to hear that NTUI were not aligned or affiliated to any political party. This is almost unheard of in India because Trade Unions are almost always aligned, affiliated or associated with political parties. Then, we went to a press conference at the Women's Journalists club. Unfortunately, the turnout was not as good as the turnout at Mumbai. We came back to the YMCA, for a delegation meeting.

**7 December:** In the morning we headed for Airport, to fly back home.



Sam Macartney with Fleactha an Irish activist. She was a great help during Bhopal visit

The visit helped delegates in building their understanding on what happened? What's happening today? What needs to happen tomorrow? And why there is a need to raise awareness about Bhopal disaster, to build pressure through Trade Union and political links. To assess what humanitarian aid and financial assistance the delegation can identify to improve the ongoing situation. It was agreed at the recent Scottish International Committee meeting, that the Committee urges upon the Scottish Branches, to use this report to raise awareness about Bhopal Disaster to build solidarity and support with Bhopal activists globally.

# SAVE KOBANE DEFEAT ISIS

*Solidarity with Kurdistan*

## Update on the Plight of Kurdish Refugees ....

**Stephen Smellie of South Lanarkshire Branch Reports**

Recently, a British delegation paid a visit to south east Turkey to observe the difficulties faced by the Kurdish people. Kurdish people live in an area they call Kurdistan. This area generally covers Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. However, the Kurdish people are an oppressed minority in each country, in general. The delegation reported most of the Kurdish refugees fleeing Islamic State (ISIS) are left to deal with by Local authorities. The relief from the Turkish government supports only a small proportion of the refugees with local authorities covering the vast majority.

Many of Yazidi refugees arrived following the genocide in Iraq at the hands of ISIS, have no international relief for them but there is a large volunteer effort, which includes contributions made by many trade unions. Yazidis refugees want asylum in Europe as they do not feel safe in Turkey and it is clear that they cannot go back to Iraq.

According to UN reports more than 3,200 buildings have been destroyed or damaged during four months of fighting for the Syrian border town of Kobane. Kobane's entire population of 4000 has been evacuated. There are two hundred thousand refugees in Turkish Kurdistan. Stephen Smellie of UNISON Scotland also visited these camps and reported these camps were a bit more organised and have set up a school.

The mood in Yazidi camp is of panic and depression. The mood in Kobane camp is much more positive as they believe they will get back to Kobane. Kurdish movement have a very strong position on women. They have adopted that every top position has to be joint with women. Stephen was showed a video clip of Fayza Abdi, Co-president of Kobane Legislative Council, has a real socialist secular revolutionary approach. She reports that they need aid but they also need weapons that will not be easy for UNISON to consider. Activists say, Syrian Kurdish Popular Protection Units (YPG) and Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga fighters are fighting ISIS. In the Syrian border town of Kobane, so far hundreds of Kurds died in the fighting and more than 1,000 IS fighters perished.

### Links to International News

**Stop Climate Chaos-[Tell Scotland's New First Minister What You Love](#)**

**Venezuela Solidarity Campaign: [70 Leading British Condemn Coup Attempt](#)**

**Medical Aid to Palestine - [Volunteer British surgeons battle to save three boys](#)**

**Palestine Solidarity Campaign - [PSC update: share, share, share!](#)**

**European Federation of Public Service Unions: [Newsletter 17 February 2015](#)**

**Cuba Solidarity Campaign - [Britain celebrates Five's freedom and Cuban Revolution](#)**;

**UNISON's International Newsletter [https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/Toweb/Int\\_Newsletter\\_February2015.pdf](https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/Toweb/Int_Newsletter_February2015.pdf)**

## Take One Action

UNISON has been working with Take One Action Film festivals. Entertaining films are a great way of engaging people in an issue, opening up discussion and mobilising people to get involved and take action. That is what Take One Action is all about.

Building on the success of the main festival based around Edinburgh and Glasgow (this year pencilled in for 16 -27<sup>th</sup> September) Take One Action have been developing a series of local festivals. These started last November in Inverness and this year festivals are planned in Dundee (20/21 March) and Aberdeen and Inverness later on.

Take One Action is looking for people to get involved in helping organise and run these festivals via local groups. This is a great opportunity to get more involved in films and to bring a trade union perspective to local groups being set up. If you or a fellow activist is interested please get in touch with Tamara as per the cc box. More info on Take One Action's local groups can be found at: <http://www.takeoneaction.org.uk/groups/locals/>

If you are not in or near Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Inverness but want to get involved there are still ways to work with TOA. They can help you set up one off or more regular screenings, again info is on the website.

As it is AGM time of year; can we remind Branches to ensure Simon MacFarlane Regional Organiser has got the email address of newly elected Branch International Officer, also if anyone would like added to the regular international email list please let Simon know. Simon can be reached at [s.macfarlane@unison.co.uk](mailto:s.macfarlane@unison.co.uk)



## Dates

### of Future International Meetings

**20-22 March**— UNISON International Seminar, Sheffield

**16 May**—Scottish International Committee Meeting.

**12 September**— Scottish International Committee Meeting.

**14 November**— Scottish International Committee Meeting.